

Letter from Taizé

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PILGRIMAGE OF TRUST IN KOLKATA

On the Road of Trust, Towards a Future of Peace

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The meeting brought together 6000 young adults from throughout India and from 37 Asian countries. It was intended to support young people in their search for God and their desire to commit themselves in the Church and in society. The theme was: "On the road of trust, towards a future of peace."

Kolkata has a very special place in the hearts of many of the Taizé brothers. Thirty years ago, when the city was still called Calcutta, Brother Roger first came and lived for a time in a poor district close by Mother Teresa. He was back again in 1997 for the funeral of

Mother Teresa, and, in spite of the sadness of the occasion, he was filled with joy to be there once again.

Over the past months, brothers of the Taizé Community have been organising a young adult meeting, together with around twenty differ-



ent parishes and local church communities in Kolkata. The Community was invited by the CBCI Youth Commission and has been working in close collaboration with the Catholic Archdiocese of Kolkata and the Church of North India. The meeting brought together 6000 young adults from throughout India and from 37 Asian countries. It was intended to support young people in their search for God and their desire to commit themselves in the Church and in society. The theme was: "On the road of trust, towards a future of peace."

Here are some day-by-day echoes of the meeting:

Wednesday 4 October: Getting Ready

The festivities of Durga Puja, the Hindu celebration observed espe-

cially in Bengal and Kolkata, linger on in this huge metropolis. On Monday evening, the statues of the goddess were transported to the river Hoogli and thrown into the waters. As night falls each day, music and dancing can be heard and seen throughout the city at makeshift temples, some simple, some very elaborate, constructed for the feast so that each neighbourhood can share in the rituals.

In the Muslim quarters, families eat together every evening at sundown to mark the end of the daily fast which continues throughout Ramadan. A sense of celebration far from Western images of fasting can be felt. Joy is palpable as the monsoon season finally draws to a close.

On the playing field of Don Bosco School, near Park Circus, another makeshift prayer tent, or *shamiana*, has been built. It will be the central place of prayer and meeting for the pilgrimage of trust meeting between October 5 and 9. Using traditional methods, with bamboo poles covered by coloured tarpaulins, the *shamiana* will be big enough to hold the several thousand young adults arriving in the city to take part in the meeting.

Last evening, the young people who have already arrived gathered together with the brothers and volunteers for prayer at Bishop's College, the Church of North India theological college. The familiar tunes of the Taizé songs were sung in Hindi and Bengali. Groups from Pakistan and Bangladesh, from Singapore and the Philippines took part, as well as Indians from many states including Tamil Nadu and Kerala, Manipur and Haryana. Also present were young Europeans from Latvia and Spain, from Luxembourg and Italy.

Brother Alois, who has just arrived in Kolkata after visiting the Taizé brothers who live in Bangladesh, spoke of his joy to meet and pray together in this city where Christians are a minority, but where they have always borne witness in a very clear and visible manner to the heart of the Gospel.

Thursday 5 October: Arrival

Early this morning, amongst the usual hustle and bustle of Howrah Station's human throng, groups of young people arrived in Kolkata on the overnight sleeper trains. From Karnataka and Kerala, from Assam and Andhra Pradesh, it seemed as



if every corner of India was represented. Teams of young volunteers from Kolkata met them as they got off the train and guided them towards St Aloysius Parish, where others were waiting to welcome them.

So many smiling faces, so many pilgrims happy to reach their destination. The meeting program was clearly explained – "this is not a conference, but a time for spiritual searching and prayer", as one young volunteer put it. After breakfast – an egg, chapattis and hot tea – the groups were split into smaller sub-groups and sent off to one of the twelve welcome centres, consisting of several parishes and church communities, for the second part of the welcome. Buses were at hand to ferry them through the busy traffic of Kolkata's city centre.

Once at the welcome centre, the preparation team found places in families for some, places in nearby schools for others. At Christ the King Parish, near Park Circus, a group of Thais had just arrived from Sealdah Station; most of the young people from outside of India had been asked to come here. This welcome centre was also receiving youth from Spain, Poland and Italy, as well as from several states of India. To see "welcome" written in so many languages and so many scripts was a marvellous sign of the universality of what we are about to experience during these days.

At Don Bosco School, the final preparations were taking place in the *shamiana* for the evening prayer. A choir consisting of young people from Bangladesh and various parts of India were practicing *bhajans*, traditional repetitive songs used often by Christians in South Asia, as well as the more familiar Taizé chants sung in Hindi and Bengali. How different they sound accompanied by the tabla (a pair of small drums played with the hands) and small cymbals!

This evening, Brother Alois will speak briefly during the evening prayer. "This is the day the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in

it," will be his opening words. Yes, there's a joy here in knowing that Christ unites us all as part of one human family in him.

Friday 6 October: Trust

Yesterday 800 people more than expected arrived! Some came very late, which meant a long day for the wellcomers, but room was found for everyone.

At Don Bosco School this morning there was such a festive mood as young people came back after their first sessions in the welcome centres throughout the city. It really is incredible to see the joy on people's faces! Though most of the participants are from India, the diversity of languages and appearances reinforces the understanding that in prayer and in seeking our common roots in the Gospel, we are one human family. All of a sudden, everyone is on the same level. There's no longer East or West, North or South.

Everyone comments on the beauty of the prayers. Even last night people were already joining in freely in the *bhajans* and Taizé songs. The simple structure of the *shamiana* was filled with beauty, expressing our longing for God and at the same time our celebration of his presence among us. To the European ear, there is something so enticing in the Indian way of singing which enables you to enter so easily into prayer. It's not just the novelty of what you're hearing, but the clear comprehension of an act of worship that rises up from the soul.

Lunch was served after midday prayer. All the food is cooked and prepared on site by a whole team of cooks, in large steel pots over gas burners. Rice with a not overly spicy sauce and either an egg or vegetables were distributed on plastic plates, together with a banana or an apple. And it really was very good! There are no cellophane wrappings to battle with. There are no knives or forks, though spoons are given for those who wish, but most eat simply with their fingers after having washed



them well, like most Indians. Watching young Europeans attempting this was quite a sight! Afterwards, the plates are all washed up, ready for use again at supper. Nothing goes to waste.

At 5pm, there were different workshops for people to attend. Under the *shamiana*, young people from West Bengal shared something of their traditions and culture with us. In the assembly hall, two Taizé brothers led a reflection on prayer. In the auditorium, many people came to the meeting about the "Dialogue of life among people of different religions." Different people spoke about meeting together, acting together and reflecting together. You could sense how in India, this really is a way of life. For most people, daily contact with people of another religion is a reality. Barriers do exist, but the great tradition is one of tolerance, respect and working together.

Saturday 7 October: Peace

It really is difficult to express in words the beauty of the common prayer here in Kolkata: a silent heartbeat in the midst of the tumult of city life. "*Prabhu hamari vinati sun*", we all sing in Hindi – Lord, hear our prayer – as the response to the intercessions, which seem like a pillar of fire rising towards God.

Last night's prayer around the cross went on for a very long time. Even the fact that supper came immediately afterwards didn't deter people from waiting patiently for their turn to place their forehead on the icon as a way of entrusting themselves and their burdens to Christ. For so many young people taking part in the meeting, this is their first contact with Taizé, but it's striking how simply and easily they have entered into the worship.

Sister Nirmala, Mother General of the Missionaries of Charity was also present and came to pray around the cross – every evening

a large number of her sisters come to the prayer – and Brother Alois spoke of the link that united Brother Roger and Mother Teresa, and of his gratitude that that link continues.

As you walk across the grounds of Don Bosco School, you meet so many different people. One young man from the Andaman Islands told how on Christmas day, 2004, he left his village to go and spend the festive season with his parents in Port Blair, the capital. The next day, the tsunami hit the islands. On returning to his village, many of his friends had been swept away. A sister from Nepal tells of the group of 35 youth she has brought with her for the meeting. Only two of them had ever left their home villages before. The four young people from Laos are all smiles! A young woman from Switzerland speaks of the welcome she received in a village to the north of Kolkata where she was sent as part of the pre-meeting program. The shyness of the first days has disappeared – now people are mingling freely, sharing their stories, their questions and their joys.

Today's theme is peace and the text chosen for the small group sharing in the afternoon is from Jeremiah 29:11-14, "I know what plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope". Our meeting together during these days seems to embody those words. How is it that we're all so different, but yet we can be as one? How can we keep that vision alive in our hearts?

One of the workshops this afternoon will be about the legacy of Rabindranath Tagore, the great Bengali poet of the last century, and his trust in humanity. He is revered by many in India and Bangladesh, irrespective of their religion or background. His poetry touches the seeking and sense of wonder present in every human being.

This evening the *shamiana* will be lit up by 6,000 candles as we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ. That's why we're here.

Sunday 8 October: Hope

One very important aspect of the Kolkata meeting is the visits to the places of hope. Ankur Kala is a co-operative for women from very poor backgrounds and who often have to raise their children alone. In their first year, the women are given a small salary and are taught a skill, such as weaving or sewing. During the second year, their salary increases and what they make is sold by the cooperative. In the third year, they no longer receive a fixed salary, but are paid according to what they make and sell. Many of the women reach the third year and even manage to open their own retail outlets. The cooperative is run by Christian women, but most of the members are Hindu. It's a fine example of how serving the poor can help overcome the barriers which all too often exist between different religions.

The Loreto sisters run a shelter for street children near to Sealdah Station. They also organise schooling for the children. In that way, children who have nothing stand a better chance of finding their way in life. Poverty and misery are very visible in Kolkata. It's not unusual to walk along the pavement and then suddenly to realize that you're walking through the space that serves as someone's bedroom, living room and kitchen... To see how some people are doing everything that they can to alleviate the suffering of their fellow human beings is both humbling and a call to do what little we can ourselves.

At evening prayer, Brother Alois will speak about the icon of friendship, which comes from Egypt, and how it shows us the friendship of God for each one of us. The icon, well known in Taizé, shows Jesus with his hand on the shoulder of a friend. Both are looking ahead. It's a beautiful image of Christ who walks with each one of us, offering us his friendship.

Copies of the icon will be given to young people from each region of India and then to someone from

each of the countries represented, with the idea that this will help a pilgrimage of trust to continue back at home. The icon can be taken to an old people's home, or to a hospital to pray with people who normally can't get out to church, or else to a gathering of young people from the area, or simply to a parish on the other side of the town that we don't visit too often... How marvellous it would be if those returning from Kolkata were able to share this spirit of pilgrimage with others!

Monday 9 October: Continuing at Home

This has been a remarkable time spent together. Everyone seems to be so thankful for the hospitality received, the careful planning of the morning program in the welcome centres and the workshops and prayers at Don Bosco School.

It was interesting yesterday to listen to the young Europeans during the meetings by country. Many of them had arrived in Kolkata a week or so before the meeting began and were sent out to villages in the surrounding area to stay with families and participate in the life of the church. One girl told how she fell sick but felt so touched by the care given by her hosts, even if it took her a little while to accept their traditional remedies! "You have to learn again and again to trust people, and although this experience wasn't easy, it helped me remember that people are fundamentally kind, caring and good-hearted."

Two Pakistanis from the State of Sind told of their joy during the small group sharing in the afternoon common sessions. They suddenly found themselves in the same group as Indian Punjabis. When India was partitioned, the Punjab was split in two between India and Pakistan, forming the states of Punjab and Sind. Opportunities for the two to meet are rare. It is little meetings like this that help us understand why we came to Kolkata.

And so the pilgrimage of trust continues – only in the weeks and months to come will we fully understand what we've experienced during this past few days.

Other articles, as well as Brother Alois' meditations, can be found on line: www.taize.fr, "Kolkata Meeting"

January 2007: Genesis 12: 1-4

Beginning with chapter 12, the book of Genesis recounts the origins of the people of Israel, starting with the story of Abraham. Before this story, the biblical author places a short account of the origins of the world (chapters 1 to 11). Does he intend to write a complete history of humankind? No, but to emphasize strongly that the God of Israel, worshipped by Abraham, is not the god of one nation only with a limited sphere of activity, but instead the Creator of all things, the Lord of the universe.

This is the God who reveals himself to Abraham. And he does so as someone with unbounded generosity: in presenting himself to Abraham, he assures him of his blessing. Abraham will gradually come to understand that God's blessing is a gift that communicates something good, not in the realm of material advantages (the story emphasizes that the family of Abraham already possesses great wealth) but in that of a deeper perception of the depths of being, of its mystery. He will realize that God's blessing is not a magical means to solve the manifold problems of human life, in distinction to the role assigned to many of the gods at that time.

In God's promise, Abraham sees a new meaning for the life which rises up before him and his posterity. And so he takes a huge risk: leaving behind everything which up to then had given him security, he sets out towards the unknown. Where does the courage to do this come from? From God's beautiful promise? Of course, but it is not immediately comprehensible, it takes time to be fulfilled and it is constantly being put to the test. More than by the promise, Abraham was taken hold of by the One who made it: the only God. Abraham became the father of believers because, confronted with the absolute of God, he went beyond fears, calculations, and reasoning, and simply trusted in the words that came from God. He trusted in God simply because God is God.

- Is my faith in God sometimes subject to conditions: "I would believe, if You..."? What are those conditions?
- What must I lay aside so that God can really find his unique place in my life?

February 2007: Psalm 137

Israel's love for its God gave it the honesty to express everything, even the most impassioned reactions at the situations of injustice often experienced by that tiny nation surrounded by powerful neighbors. Has any other people ever gone to such an extreme in its intimacy with God, to the point of daring to express rebellion in the very midst of praise? Psalm 137 weaves these two sentiments together with impressive intensity.

For us today, placidly seated in our comfortable societies, the violence that springs from the cry of the psalmist leaves us ill-at-ease. How could we wish for the little children of another nation, even that of an oppressor, to be massacred?

We should not make too rapid judgments, however, especially from so far away. Our faith must also teach us to sit down and sing "beside the waters of Babylon" alongside those who were deprived of their dignity as free women and men. The fall of Jerusalem in 585 BC and the deportation of part of the population was more than a military defeat: it involved the risk of seeing one's own people lose their identity as a result of the humiliations imposed by the victor.

Psalm 137 was most likely composed by musicians exiled from the temple in Jerusalem who, as a sign of mourning, decided to "hang their harps on the willows there." Although their captors forced them to play, these musicians refused to use their songs of worship to entertain those who were keeping them captive.

Compelled to sing nonetheless, they sang that they will never be able to sing in a foreign land. When they were obliged to do what they did not want to do, their prayer, even when forced from their lips, remained that final space of freedom where an inexorable fate was overturned and where, to make the victors happy, they even succeeded in singing threats to them: Their captors fell into a trap of their own making. History will often attest to the subversive power of song. How many peoples have begun to shake off their chains while singing:

- How can praise arise out of distress?
- How can prayer become a form of resistance in the face of what seems an inexorable fate?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

JANUARY

DAILY READINGS

- 1** **Mon** When they had seen the child Jesus in the manger, the shepherds made known what they had been told concerning him and everyone who heard was astonished. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.
Lk 2:16-21
- 2** **Tue** From the prophet Isaiah: Look, this is our God; we put our hope in him and he saved us. Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.
Is 25:6-9
- 3** **Wed** God has wanted to reveal to the nations the splendid riches of the mystery which is Christ in you.
Col 1:24-28
- 4** **Thu** The nations will walk in the light of Christ, and the kings of the earth will bring their treasure to the city of God.
Rv 21:22-27
- 5** **Fri** The Lord says: I shall lead my people by a road that is unknown to them. I shall turn the darkness into light before them.
Is 42:10-17
- 6** **Sat** EPIPHANY Paul writes: The mystery of Christ is that all peoples now share the same inheritance, being members of one body, and having received the same promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel.
Ep 3:2-6
- 7** **SUN** The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."
Lk 3:15-22
- 8** **Mon** We called on the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry. God saw our misery, our toil and oppression and brought us out of the land of slavery.
Dt 26:1-11
- 9** **Tue** Sing and rejoice, my people, for I am coming to live among you, says the Lord.
Zc 2:14-17
- 10** **Wed** When I say, "I am slipping," your faithful love, Lord, supports me.
Ps 94:14-22
- 11** **Thu** Peter said: God sent his word, and announced the good news of peace through Jesus Christ; he is the Lord of all.
Ac 10:34-43
- 12** **Fri** Isaiah said: The peoples of the earth will say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord so that he may teach us his ways."
Is 2:2-5
- 13** **Sat** Paul writes: Through our faith in Christ Jesus, we can approach God with complete confidence.
Ep 3:7-12
- 14** **SUN** From the prophet Isaiah: For the sake of my people, I shall not keep silent. I shall not rest until her justice shines out like the breaking of day. And then all will see your justice, and you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.
Is 62:1-5
- 15** **Mon** Solomon prayed: Listen, Lord, forgive and act; deal with every person according to all they do, since you know their heart — you alone know the heart of everyone.
1 K 8:22-40
- 16** **Tue** Let us not love just with words and in speech, but with actions and in truth.
1 Jn 3:14-20
- 17** **Wed** Stand firm, let nothing shake you, be full of energy for the work of God, knowing that in the Lord nothing of your labour is wasted.
1 Co 15:54-58
- 18** **Thu** Jesus said: I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for having revealed to little children what you have hidden from the learned and clever.
Mt 11:25-27
- 19** **Fri** Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.
2 Co 5:11-21
- 20** **Sat** Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near.
Ph 4:4-7
- 21** **SUN** Jesus read out these words of Isaiah the prophet: The Spirit of the Lord is on me. God has sent me to announce good news to the afflicted, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed.
Lk 4:14-21
- 22** **Mon** I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord and of the many good things he has done for his people in his mercy.
Is 63:7-14
- 23** **Tue** Jesus said to his disciples: Let us go elsewhere — to the nearby villages — so that I can proclaim the message there too.
Mk 1:35-39
- 24** **Wed** Having told the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus asked, "Who showed themselves to be a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" They answered him, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."
Lk 10:25-37
- 25** **Thu** Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.
Mk 16:15-20
- 26** **Fri** Eli told the child Samuel: If you are called again, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."
1 S 3:1-18
- 27** **Sat** Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins.
Ep 2:4-6
- 28** **SUN** Paul writes: Even if I can understand all mysteries and know all things, even if I have the faith to move mountains, if I am without love I am nothing.
1 Co 13:1-13
- 29** **Mon** The Lord is my shepherd, nothing do I lack. You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Ps 23
- 30** **Tue** The Lord says: I am coming to gather the people of every nation and language, and they will see my glory.
Is 66:18-21
- 31** **Wed** Do not let anything worry you, but in every situation, by prayer with thanksgiving, let God know your desires.
Ph 4:4-7

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

FEBRUARY

DAILY READINGS

God of all loving, we would like to listen to you when your call resounds in our depths: "Go forward; let your soul live!"

4SUN Lk 5:1-11 Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." "Master," Simon replied, "we have worked hard all night long without catching anything, but because you say so I will let down the nets."

5Mon Rm 8:14-17 Paul writes: You did not receive a spirit which makes you a slave to fear again; you received the spirit of adoption by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

6Tue Jr 1:4-8 God said to Jeremiah: Go to everyone I send you to. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to protect you.

7Wed Ac 2:42-47 All the believers held everything in common. They sold their goods and possessions and shared the proceeds according to the needs of each person.

8Thu Ps 105:1-5 Seek God and his strength, seek God's face at all times. Remember the wonders God has done.

9Fri 1 Co 13:1-13 Love is patient and kind. Love does not seek its own advantage. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth.

10Sat Jn 12:47-50 Jesus said: I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.

1Thu Mt 16:21-27

Jesus said: Whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever risks their life for my sake will find it.

2Fri Lk 2:22-32

PRESENTATION OF THE LORD When he saw the child Jesus, Simeon praised God, saying: My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples — a light to enlighten the nations.

3Sat Zp 3:14-18a

Your God is with you. God will quiet you with his love and dance with joy for you.

11SUN Lk 6:20-35 Looking at his disciples, Jesus said: Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

12Mon Na 1:7-8 God is better than a fortress in time of distress; he recognises those who trust in him even when the flood rushes on.

13Tue Rm 8:28-30 Paul writes: In all things God works for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose.

14Wed Pr 23:15-19 Let your heart remain constant in the adoration of God; for there is a future and your hope will not come to nothing.

15Thu 1 P 4:7-11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one speaking the very words of God; if anyone serves, let it be as one fulfilling God's service, so that in everything God may receive the glory, through Jesus Christ.

16Fri Is 43:1-4a Thus says God who created you: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name, you are mine.

17Sat 2 Co 13:11-13 Paul writes: Live in joyfulness. Encourage one another. Be of one mind and live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

18SUN Lk 6:27-35 Jesus said: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

19Mon Rm 15:1-7,13 St. Paul writes: We should not try to please ourselves, but consider what is good for our neighbours and so build up community.

20Tue Jr 20:7-9 Jeremiah said: The word of the Lord has brought insult and derision upon me. And so I said to myself, "I shall not think about him, I shall no longer speak in his name." But there seemed to be a burning fire in my heart, which I could not contain.

21Wed Mt 6:1-6 **ASH WEDNESDAY** Jesus said: When you give, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your generosity is secret. And your Father, who sees all that is done in secret, will reward you.

22Thu Lk 9:18-24 Jesus said: Whoever wants to be a follower of mine must renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

23Fri Rm 8:26-27 We do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit comes to help us in our weakness and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

24Sat Lk 14:1-14 Jesus said: When you have a dinner, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, and you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you.

25SUN Lk 4:1-13 Jesus said to the tempter, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, him alone must you serve.'"

26Mon Mt 12:14-21 Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah: My servant will not quarrel or cry out, he will not snuff out the smouldering wick. All the nations will put their hope in him.

27Tue 1 P 4:7-11 Peter writes: Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over many a sin.

28Wed Si 14:1-6,14-16 Happy are those who are not in anguish over their failings. For if a person is hard upon themselves, to whom will they be kind?

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Faizv. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

What does the Bible tell us about the attitude of believers towards the wider society?

The Bible deals with this question through the theme of the city. In the Book of Genesis, cities are viewed with mistrust. Cain, the man of violence, is the first person to build a city (see Genesis 4:17). Babel and Sodom are places where human beings seek false autonomy, turning their backs on the Source of their existence. Believers, on the contrary, walk in the steps of Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-4) and live as pilgrims who are on the road towards other horizons, with faith alone as their compass.

Later on another city appears: Jerusalem, the City-of-Peace, founded not on human self-aggrandizement but on God's promise. Its existence shows that faith does not call us to flee from this-worldly realities, but leads to a new way of living together in justice and solidarity.

There is nothing automatic about this, however. Even Jerusalem can be unfaithful to its vocation if those who live there do not follow the ways of the Lord. By practicing injustice, "daughter Zion" becomes a prostitute (see Isaiah 1:21-23). And yet believers keep longing for a righteous king to come, someone sent by God to purify his city and make it a beacon and a pole of attraction for the whole world (see Isaiah 2:2-4).

The disciples of Jesus identified this righteous king with the figure of their Master. But Jesus, who died as someone rejected and cast outside the city (see Hebrews 13:12-14), founded no human kingdom. His followers therefore remain "sojourners and foreigners" (1 Peter 2:11) in the midst of a society that is indifferent, and even hostile, to their endeavors. They do not remain on the defensive, however. While refusing to be deluded by any of the self-justifications of the powers-that-be, they attempt to contribute to the good of the society in which God has placed them.

The last book of the Bible views all human history as a tale of two cities. Babylon, impressive in its might and glory, will nonetheless disappear in the twinkling of an eye (see Revelation 17-18). Then comes New Jerusalem, founded on the patriarchs and the apostles (see Revelation 21-22). If the city of God is not yet manifest in all its splendor, it is not a mere hope for the future either. By living the values of the Gospel here and now, by forming communities where men and women from every background live together as brothers and sisters, the disciples of Christ offer a concrete alternative to a world forgetful of its origin and its goal. Far from remaining content with an attitude of refusal, they become salt and light to those both near and far.

How can Saint Paul say that "whoever rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted" (Romans 13:2)?

For some people, this controversial passage from the Letter to the Romans exalts obedience to the State and forbids resistance. For others, precisely for this reason it is not in harmony with the message of the Christ who proclaimed the total liberation of human beings.

Did Saint Paul distance himself from Jesus in this regard? Far from being a systematic theologian, Paul was above all a pastor and a missionary. His letters are inevitably marked by their context. Paul was writing to the Romans at a critical time, when Nero had just succeeded his assassinated father as ruler. Listening to wise counselors at first, the young emperor was putting into practice a policy of reforms. In addition, a few years earlier his father Claudius had exiled all the Jews from Rome on account of riots for which he held them responsible. Christians of Jewish background had just returned to the capital. Paul feels strongly that the followers of Christ need to do all they can to show that they are well-disposed; they must avoid rekindling the suspicions people had concerning them, all the more so because some of their practices and positions were obviously counter-cultural.

In fact, Paul's advice to his hearers does not go far beyond the rest of the New Testament. They should pay taxes, do good rather than evil, and recognize that all authority comes from God. If this last recommendation can be used to justify despotic policies, understood correctly it acts rather to limit abuses of power. The king has to realize that he is not the final instance and thus cannot govern in an arbitrary manner.

This is exactly the meaning of the words that Jesus says to Pontius Pilate when the Roman governor tries to impress him by his power: "You would have no authority over me at all were it not given you from above" (John 19:11).

The Bible is thus not dualistic. God is not only the Lord of a small enclave of the elect, but the Creator and the Master of all, even if his authority is often expressed in apparent weakness and is far from being recognized by all. Concerned with the whole of society, Christians have the right, and even the duty, to raise their voices when the requirements of justice are violated. They should not attempt, however, to impose their views by methods contrary to the Gospel. And they do not aim primarily at human success but rather to give good witness, knowing that they are called to follow the same road as that of Christ himself: "May none of you have to suffer as murderers or thieves or wrongdoers or even as troublemakers; but if you suffer because you are Christians, do not be ashamed; give glory to God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:14-16).

News of the Pilgrimage of Trust

Europe

Brother Alois in Brussels, London, Berlin and Lyon

In the first months of his new ministry, Brother Alois, accompanied by other brothers, made four visits: to Pope Benedict XVI, to the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomeos of Constantinople, to the World Council of Churches meeting in Porto Alegre (Brazil) and to the Orthodox Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow. "Through these visits I wanted to show that my brothers and I are passionately seeking communion among Christians. In Taizé we would like to contribute to giving greater visibility to the communion which, in Christ, already exists among all the baptized."

He will continue these visits in the near future:

Friday 3 November at 8pm, during a church gathering, a prayer with the songs of Taizé will take place in the cathedral of Brussels; Cardinal Danneels will be present and Brother Alois will give a reflection.

Thursday 16 November at 8pm, evening prayer and a vigil around the cross in the cathedral of Bradford, in England. Saturday 18 November at 7pm, a prayer at Westminster Abbey in London, with the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor and the two other co-presidents, Baptist and Orthodox, of the English Council of Churches.

Sunday 19 November at 6pm, in the Berlin Cathedral, a prayer with young people, during which the Lutheran bishop Huber, president of the German Evangelical Church, will also give a reflection and at which Cardinal Sterzinsky will be present.

Sunday 10 December, a prayer in Lyons at St John's Cathedral for the closing of the Festival of Light, with Cardinal Barbarin (4pm workshops; 6:30pm prayer of light).

Senegal

Africa Locked and Barred?

The "Welcome Point for Refugees and Immigrants" in Dakar, Senegal, was set up at the initiative of the Taizé brothers some twelve years ago in collaboration with the

parishes and religious communities of the city.

Since the dramatic events that occurred last October in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the migratory flows of would-be emigrants from sub-Saharan Africa have changed rapidly. They no longer go northward across the desert, a route that turned the urban centers of Tamanrasset (Algeria) or AgadGs (Niger) into lively departure points. Over the past few years, an alternative route had begun to be exploited through the Western Sahara. Huddled among the dunes along the coast, people would wait for the ocean to calm, then with a bit of luck in two days they might arrive in the Canary Islands, which are Spanish, part of Europe. In Dakar we still recall the case of the woman from Niger, who had set out almost at full term in her pregnancy and gave birth right on the beach as she arrived, after the hardship of the journey and a rather bumpy landing, to a baby who was therefore "Spanish." With the rights attached to the baby's nationality allowing family members to join it, the whole family had reached its goal.

Things have changed a lot since then. Morocco has closed its frontiers and Nouadhibou, the westernmost port of Mauritania, has taken over, finding itself invaded by hordes of would-be travelers, most from the countries of the Sahel but some from much further away. There is now no question of hiding, as in the past, in the holds of ships headed for Europe with the risk of being discovered in the early hours thanks to police tear-gas bombs. Now we are in the era of the small motor-boat. Two outboard motors, a couple of GPS systems and some fifty passengers embarking under the very nose of the police will do. Now it takes at least five days of dangerous navigation, heading north first of all, not too far from the coast in order to avoid the Spanish coastguards' ships and not too close so as to escape the Moroccan police. Putting into port here and there before the main crossing. That is when many boats disappear: rotten hulls, failing motors, navigations systems swept away by the waves, unreliable pilots....

Spain now offers logistical support to Mauritania to reduce if not prevent the departures. The increased supervision closed down operations. At once things moved further south. From now on people even set out from Dakar. That means that the journey has grown increasingly longer, increasingly dangerous, and expensive. There is talk of over 3fl0,000 Francs CFA per person (about 4fl0 Euros), the cost of a plane ticket to Europe.

What of the future? It seems clear that Europe, feeling under siege, will continue to pile on the pressure and offers of aid in the hope that African governments will reduce or stop the flood at the source. With Draconian frontier checks and forced repatriations of those from neighboring countries, it looks as though perhaps

the "freedom of movement of persons and goods" proclaimed so loudly by the Community of the States of West Africa, an important step toward the much-dreamed-of unity of the continent, may become the first victim of these efforts. So Africa would find itself little by little locked in on itself. Yet surely it is an illusion to think that in such ways it might be possible to put a stop to a movement born of such desperation.

Never before has the Welcome Point for Refugees and Immigrants run by the Dakar Caritas Organization had to look after people from within Senegal. But now there is a new category of people asking for help, those who have been deported or forced back. Driven out of Morocco or Mauritania, they end up in Dakar, utterly at a loss. In order to attempt the journey to Europe, they had to take out a loan or were financed by their family or village; they set off bearing the hopes of a whole group. Now they have failed, they have lost everything, they are crushed by shame. There can be no thought of returning to their village, where they would be confronted by their creditors, and how could they repay them? To say nothing of seeing the attitude of others toward their failure. So here they are, refugees in their own country, without resources or family. And with hearts full of an insatiable desire to defeat an inevitable Fate. They will do anything as they try to get across the barriers that are being made higher and higher.

Letter from Taizé

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